



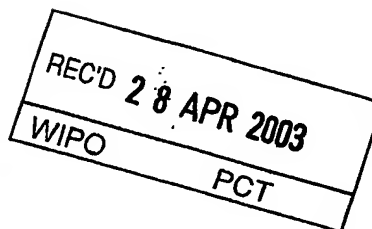
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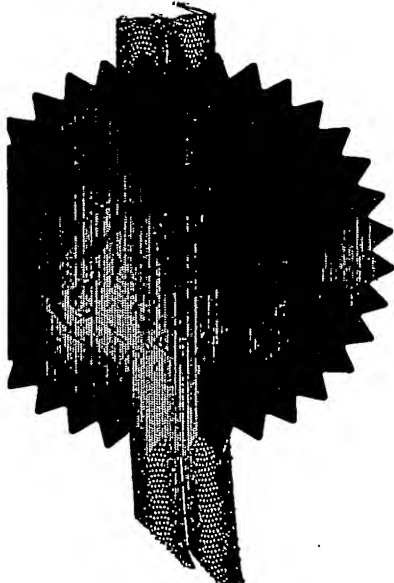


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4. Title of the invention	METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR LOADING A CONTAINER WITH A PRODUCT		
5. Name of your agent (if you have one) "Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode) Patents ADP number (if you know it)	DR CHRISTOPHER GERARD PIKE PIKE & CO. HAYES LOFT 68A HAYES PLACE MARLOW BUCKS SL7 2BT 6552335002		
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Description 19

Claim(s) 10

Abstract 1

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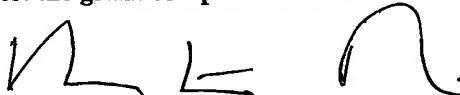
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Notes

Method and apparatus for loading a container with a product

Field of invention

This invention relates to a method and apparatus for loading a container with a defined quantity of product. This invention has particular application to loading a blister in a blister pack with a defined quantity of medicament in powder form.

Background to the invention

The use of blister packs to hold medicaments for inhalation devices, for example in bronchodilation therapy, is well known. The blister packs usually consist of a base sheet in which blisters are formed. The blisters are arranged on the base sheet and can be filled with medicament to be administered through use of an inhalation device. A lid sheet is applied to cover the filled blisters and the two sheets are sealed together to form a blister pack.

There can, however, be problems associated with methods of filling the blisters with medicament. Powder, particularly the drug component of the powder, can tend to be attracted to the base sheet surface rather than to the blister pockets. This attraction of the drug to the base sheet can result in inaccurate filling of the blisters, create mess and potentially cause problems with adherence of the lid sheet to the base sheet. Such filling methods may also require a large reservoir of powder, potentially resulting in waste of the medicament.

In earlier PCT Patent Application No. WO 00/71419, the Applicant described that the potential problem of powder adherence can be overcome by using a filling method utilising a perforated plate to mask the base sheet surface during filling to avoid covering this area with powder and a director (e.g. a director blade) to direct the powder into the perforations of the plate. The perforated plate is moved into contact

with the appropriate areas of the blister strip during filling and then moved away at the end of the method and can be reused in each cycle. This filling method can also be used to fill other types of containers e.g. injection moulded plastic pockets, capsules or bulk containers.

The Applicant has now found that the above filling method may be improved when the perforated plate and director blade are moved in a rotary fashion relative to each other. When such a rotary relationship exists between these two components, faster methods of filling are enabled including those operable on a continuous rotary basis.

Summary of the invention

According to one aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of loading a container with a defined quantity of product which comprises:

- a) closing off a perforation in a perforated plate;
- b) directing powder into said closed-off perforation by the sweeping action of a first director blade spaced from said perforated plate; and
- c) transferring the contents of the perforation to said container,

characterized by relative rotary motion of the perforated plate and said first director blade.

The present invention requires relative rotary motion of the perforated plate and the first director blade. That is to say, the perforated plate and first director blade move relative to each other and the motion is in a rotary sense.

It is not necessary that either the plate or the director blade be configured to rotate about the other. More typically, one component rotates about an axis and the other component is either (a) held static at a defined radial point separate from that axis; or (b) rotates about a second axis. In any case, it may be appreciated that the overall relative rotary motion will define a relative path (i.e. direction) of motion.

In one aspect, the first director blade is held static and the perforated plate moves in rotary fashion relative thereto.

In an alternative aspect, the perforated plate is held static and the first director blade moves in rotary fashion relative thereto.

In a further aspect, both of the first director blade and the perforated plate move in rotary fashion. In other words, both are rotated such as to also result in relative movement therebetween. Embodiments are envisaged in which the first (and any other) director blade rotates at a different speed from that of the rotating perforated plate, but about a common rotational axis. Other embodiments are envisaged in which the axes of rotation are different (e.g. perpendicular).

The method requires closing off a perforation in a perforated plate. That is to say, it requires closing off open end of a perforation to form a well into which powder may then be directed.

In one aspect, the closing off is achievable by the use of a blanking plate.

In another aspect, the closing off is achievable by the use of a blanking pin inserted into the perforation. Preferably the blanking pin is moveable within the perforation to adjust the volume of the closed-off perforation.

In a further aspect, the closing off is achievable by placing a container in registration with the perforation.

Suitably, the diameter of the closed-off perforation is between 1.5 and 15mm. The perforation may be a variety of shapes, such as square, circular, oval or rectangular.

The powder is directable by the action of the first director blade moving relative to the perforated plate. This relative movement creates a sweeping action, which acts such as to direct powder into a closed-off perforation.

Preferably, the first director blade (and any other director blade) presents a forward acute angle to the path of relative motion. The path of motion is defined by the relative rotary motion of the perforated plate and the first director blade. In this case,

the angle between the direction of the (sweeping) path and the first (and any other) director blade is less than 90° (i.e. acute). Preferably the forward acute angle is between 1 and 60° . More preferably the forward acute angle is between 5 and 25° .

In a further aspect, the first (and any subsequent) director blade presents multiple forward acute angles to the path of relative motion. Such a first (or any subsequent) director blade is typically articulated or curved.

It is also possible, but less preferred to use a first (and any subsequent) director blade presenting a perpendicular or forward obtuse angle to the path of relative motion.

Optionally, the first director blade has plural movements relative to the perforated plate. The number of plural movements can be varied according to the flow properties of the powder to help ensure that the powder has a uniform density, resulting in more accurate dosing. Passing a director blade across the perforated plate more than once may in some circumstances be more economical than having multiple blades, although the time taken to fill the closed-off perforations may be greater than when using multiple blades.

Suitably, a thin layer of powder is left on the perforated plate after movement of the first director blade. Preferably the depth of said thin layer of powder is from 3 to 20 mm. More preferably the depth of said thin layer of powder is from 4 to 8 mm.

Suitably, the powder is directable by at least one subsequent director blade. Said at least one subsequent director blade and the perforated plate move in rotary fashion relative to each other. Preferably, the at least one subsequent director blade moves along the perforated plate at a lower level than that of the first director blade. This ensures that the at least one subsequent director blade can move through the thin layer of powder left by the first director blade and not just along the surface of the powder.

Suitably, the distance between the level of movement of the first director blade and the at least one subsequent director blade is 0 to 12 mm. More preferably, the

distance between the level of movement of the first director blade and the at least one subsequent director blade is 1 to 3 mm. A second subsequent director blade would move along the perforated plate at a lower level to that of a first subsequent director blade.

An additional aspect of the present invention comprises removing excess powder from said perforated plate subsequent to directing powder into the perforation. Preferably the excess powder is removed by the action of a wiper. It will be appreciated that typically said wiper and the perforated plate are moving in a relative rotary sense. The wiper is typically a blade composed of stainless steel and moves in close proximity to the surface of the perforated plate to ensure that excess powder is not transferred to the blind cavity.

Suitably, the contents of the perforation are transferable by the action of a transfer pin. The pin is inserted into the perforation, transferring the powder through to the container.

Suitably, the direction of powder into the closed-off perforation and transfer into the blind cavity is a continuous step.

In one aspect, transfer of the contents of the perforation to the container comprises:

- a) reopening the perforation;
- b) placing the container in registration with the perforation; and
- c) transferring the contents of the perforation into the container.

In another aspect, the contents of the perforation are transferable by the action of a vacuum system. Preferably the vacuum comprises a vacuum head and at least one vacuum cup.

An additional aspect of the present invention comprises compacting the powder in the perforation.

Suitably, the powder is compacted to a volume of between 50 and 100%, for example 70 to 90%, of the original volume of powder in the closed-off perforation.

Suitably, the powder is compactable by the action of a compacting pin. Suitably, the transfer pin and the compacting pin are integral. More preferably the transfer pin and the compacting pin are identical.

Suitably, the container is a blind cavity. Preferably, the blind cavity is selected from the group consisting of a blister pocket, an injection moulded plastic pocket, a capsule and a bulk container. A blister pocket or injection moulded plastic pocket may form part of an elongate strip used in inhalation devices.

An additional aspect of the present invention comprises applying a lid to the container to protect the contents therein. The lid may then be sealed to the container.

In a particular aspect there is provided, a method of loading each of plural blisters arranged in series on an elongate blister strip with a defined quantity of product which comprises:

- a) closing off plural perforations in a perforated plate, said plural perforations being arranged in series;
- b) directing powder into said plural closed-off perforations by the sweeping action of a first director blade spaced from said perforated plate; and
- c) transferring the contents of each of the perforations to a corresponding blister of said elongate blister strip,

characterized by relative rotary motion of the perforated plate and said first director blade.

Suitably, in the transferring step, each perforation of the perforated plate is serially brought into registration with the corresponding blister of the blister strip. Preferably, at the point of registration the perforated plate is rotating and the blister strip is moving on a linear path.

Suitably, the powder comprises a medicament. Preferably, the medicament is selected from the group consisting of albuterol, salmeterol, fluticasone propionate

and beclomethasone dipropionate and salts or solvates thereof and any mixtures thereof. A preferred combination comprises salmeterol xinafoate and fluticasone propionate. Optionally, excipient such as lactose or another sugar may be present together with the medicament.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided an apparatus for loading a container with a defined quantity of product, which comprises:

- a) a perforated plate;
- b) a closure for reversibly closing off a perforation in the perforated plate;
- c) a director for directing powder into said closed-off perforation, said director comprising a first director blade spaced from the perforated plate; and
- d) a transferor for transferring the contents of the perforation to said container,

wherein the perforated plate and said first director blade are movable in a relative rotary fashion.

In one aspect, the first director blade is held static and the perforated plate is movable in rotary fashion relative thereto.

In another aspect, the perforated plate is held static and the first director blade is movable in rotary fashion relative thereto.

In a further aspect, both of the first director blade and the perforated plate are movable in rotary fashion. Different co-rotatory embodiments are envisaged, as described hereinbefore.

The perforated plate forms the basis for a powder reservoir and may have sidewalls to form a (walled) container suitable for holding powder.

In one aspect, the closure comprises a blanking plate.

In another aspect, the closure comprises a blanking pin inserted into the perforation.

Suitably the blanking pin is moveable within the perforation to adjust the volume of the perforation.

In a further aspect, the closure comprises the container placed in registration with the perforation.

Suitably, the diameter of the closed-off perforation is between 1.5 and 15mm. The perforation may be a variety of shapes, such as square, circular, oval or rectangular.

Suitably, the first (and any subsequent) director blade presents a forward acute angle to the path of relative motion. Preferably, the forward acute angle is between 1 and 60° such as between 5 and 25°.

Suitably, the first (and any subsequent) director blade presents multiple forward acute angles to the linear sweeping path.

In one aspect, the first (and any subsequent) director blade is curved in form.

In another aspect, the first (and any subsequent) director blade is articulated in form.

Suitably, the first (and any subsequent) director blade has a flat tail section.

Suitably, the first director blade is positioned to leave a gap of between 3 and 20mm between the first director blade and the perforated plate. More preferably the first director blade is positioned to leave a gap of between 4 and 8mm between the first director blade and the perforated plate.

Suitably, the director comprises at least one subsequent director blade. In use, the perforated plate and said at least one subsequent director blade are characterized by rotary relative action. Suitably, the at least one subsequent director blade is positioned closer to the perforated plate than the first director blade. Preferably, the at least one subsequent director blade is positioned 0 to 12mm closer to the perforated plate than the first director blade. More preferably the at least one subsequent director blade is positioned 1 to 3 mm closer to the perforated plate than the first director blade. A second subsequent director blade would move along the perforated plate at a lower level to that of a first subsequent director blade.

In one aspect, the transferor comprises a transferor pin.

In another aspect, the transferor comprises a vacuum system. Suitably the vacuum system comprises a vacuum head and a series of vacuum cups.

An additional aspect of the present invention comprises a compactor for compacting the powder in the perforation. Suitably, the compactor comprises a compactor pin.

Suitably, the transferor and compactor are integral. More preferably the transferor and compactor are identical.

An additional aspect of the present invention comprises registration means for registering the container (i.e. bringing it into registration) with the perforation.

An additional aspect of the present invention comprises a powder remover for removing excess powder from the perforated plate subsequent to action of the powder director. Suitably, the powder remover comprises a wiper. In use, the wiper and the perforated plate are in rotary relative motion. The wiper is typically a blade composed of stainless steel and moves in close proximity to the surface of the perforated plate to ensure that excess powder is not transferred to the blind cavity.

Suitably, the container is a blind cavity. Preferably, the blind cavity is selected from the group consisting of a blister pocket, an injection moulded plastic pocket, a capsule and a bulk container. A blister pocket or injection moulded plastic pocket may form part of an elongate strip used in inhalation devices.

An additional aspect of the present invention comprises a lid applier for applying a lid to the container to protect the contents (e.g. powder) thereof.

According to a particular aspect there is provided an apparatus for loading each of plural blisters arranged in series on an elongate blister strip with a defined quantity of product, which comprises:

- a) a perforated plate having plural perforations therein, said plural perforations being arranged in series;
- b) a closure for reversibly closing off each of said plural perforations in the perforated plate;
- c) a director for directing powder into each of said closed-off perforations, said director comprising a first director blade spaced from the perforated plate; and
- d) a transferor for transferring the contents of each of the perforations to a corresponding blister of said elongate blister strip,

wherein the perforated plate and said first director blade are movable in a relative rotary fashion.

Suitably, the apparatus additionally comprises registration means to serially bring each perforation of the perforated plate into registration with a corresponding blister of the blister strip.

Suitably, the apparatus additionally comprises rotational means to rotate the perforated plate and moving means to move the blister strip in linear fashion. At the point of registration, the perforations of the plate are therefore rotating serially and the blisters of the blister strip are moving serially in linear fashion. For good registration, the linear velocities of the perforations and blisters must be matched.

Suitably, the apparatus further comprises powder. Preferably, the powder comprises a medicament. Preferably, the medicament is selected from the group consisting of albuterol, salmeterol, fluticasone propionate and beclomethasone dipropionate and salts or solvates thereof and any mixtures thereof. A preferred combination comprises salmeterol xinafoate and fluticasone propionate.

The invention also provides a powder product obtainable by the method as herein described.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1a, 1b and 1c show the first stage in a filling method in accord with the present invention;

Figure 2 shows the first stage in an alternative filling method in accord with the present invention;

Figure 3 shows an optional subsequent compaction stage in the filling method of Figures 1a, 1b, 1c and 2;

Figure 3A shows a variation of the embodiment of Figure 3;

Figure 4 shows a subsequent transfer stage in the filling method of Figures 1a, 1b, 1c and 2;

Figure 4A shows a variation of the embodiment of Figure 4;

Figure 5a shows rotary filling apparatus in accord with the present invention; and

Figure 5b shows a schematic (flattened out) side view of the rotary apparatus of Figure 5a.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

Figures 1a, 1b and 1c show the first stages in a filling method herein. A rotationally mounted (mounting not visible) perforated plate 10 in contact with a blanking plate 20 creates closed-off perforations 12a, 12b, which (not visible in side view) are in rotary series (i.e. spaced radially from the axis of rotation of the perforated plate 10). On the opposite side of the perforated plate 10 to the blanking plate 20 is a reservoir of powder 30. The powder 30 comprises a suitable medicament formulation. Situated above the powder reservoir are director blades 40, 42 and wiper blade 50. The director blades may be seen to have following tail sections.

The director blades 40, 42 (i.e. first director blade 40, and subsequent director blade 42) are shown mounted at an angle of approximately 45° to the perforated plate 10. It should however be appreciated that the director blades 40, 42 may be mounted at any angle within a wide range, typically (but not exclusively) at an acute angle and

preferably between 1 and 60°, and may be varied according to the properties of the powder to optimise powder direction. When the blades are angled at an acute angle they exert a compressive force on the powder which produces a powder bed with a more uniform density than using perpendicular blades. It should be appreciated that curved or articulated blades may alternatively be used. The tail sections of the director blades 40, 42 are not essential to their action although they may also be angled and exert a further compressive force on the powder. The wiper blade 50 is shown mounted at an angle of approximately 90° to the perforated plate 10, however effective operation of the wiper 50 can be obtained within a wide range of angles.

The powder 30 is directed into the perforations 12a, 12b on rotation of the perforated plate 10 by the action of static director blades 40, 42 which thereby move through the powder reservoir 30 on a sweeping rotary path, moving the powder 30 along the rotating perforated plate 10. The first director blade 40 moves through the powder reservoir 30 leaving a thin layer of excess powder 32 still in contact with the perforated plate 10. The second director blade 42 moves relative to the perforated plate 10 at a lower level than the first director blade 40, moving through the thin layer of excess powder 32 and directing powder 30 into any spaces in the perforations 12a, 12b not filled by the action of the first director blade 40. Additional director blades may follow the second director blade 42 if required. Alternatively, the director blades 40, 42 may be passed through the powder reservoir 30 more than once if the powder has poor flow properties. A static wiper 50, typically a blade composed of stainless steel, mounted in rotary series with the two director blades 40, 42 then moves through the powder reservoir 30 in close proximity to the surface of the rotating perforated plate 10, removing the excess powder 32 from the perforated plate surface 10.

Figure 2 shows the first stage in an alternative filling method herein. Blanking pins 180a, 180b are inserted into a rotatable perforated plate 110 to create closed-off perforations 112a, 112b. The blanking pins 180a, 180b and closed-off perforations 112a, 112b are each in corresponding rotary series. The volume of the closed-off perforations 112a, 112b may be varied by varying the insertion depth of the blanking pins 180a, 180b. On the opposite side of the perforated plate 110 to the blanking pins 180a, 180b is a reservoir of powder 130. The powder 130 comprises a suitable

medicament formulation. The powder 130 is directed into the perforations 112a, 112b (as shown in Figures 1a and 1b) by the action of a director blade 140 which moves across the powder reservoir 130 on a rotary path as the perforated plate 110 is rotated and moves the powder 130 along the perforated plate 110, leaving a thin layer of excess powder 132 still in contact with the perforated plate 110. The director blade shown illustrates a blade with a longer tail section than the blades shown in Figures 1a, 1b and 1c and this tail section is shown angled at about 10° to the rotary path. However it should be appreciated that any blade in accord with the present invention may be used to fill the perforations closed off by the blanking pins. A wiper 150 follows the director blade 140 (as shown in Figure 1c) and moves radially along the powder reservoir 130 in close proximity to the surface of the perforated plate 110, removing the excess powder 132 from the perforated plate surface 110.

Figure 3 shows an optional subsequent stage to Figures 1a, 1b 1c and Figure 2 in which compaction pins 270a, 270b (mounted in rotary series) are inserted into the closed-off perforations 212a, 212b (also in rotary series) to compact the powder 230 held within the perforation 212a, 212b. The figure shows a blanking plate 220 acting to close off the perforations as in Figures 1a, 1b and 1c however it should be appreciated that this stage is also applicable to the situation where blanking pins are used to close off the perforations as in Figure 2. The blanking plate 220 may then be removed from its position in contact with the perforated plate 210 or the blanking pins removed from the closed-off perforations 212a, 212b. The powder 230 generally has poor flow properties and therefore remains in the perforations 212a, 212b.

Figure 3A shows a variation of the embodiment of Figure 3 in which the compaction pins 270a, 270b (only two labelled for clarity) have piston drive mechanisms, which enable the pins 270a, 270b to be sequentially lowered in a cascade pattern (e.g. sinusoidal pattern) as the perforations 212a, 212b are rotated past. Dotted line A-B shows a snapshot of the cascade pattern wherein the pins cascade in the direction from A to B, such that at point A the pin is moving down to the plate 210 and at point B it is moving away from the plate 210.

Figure 4 shows a further stage to Figures 1a, 1b, 1c, 2 and 3 in which a blister strip 360 is moved so that it is positioned with blister pockets 362a, 362b into registration

with the perforations 312a, 312b, which are in rotary series. It will be appreciated that for a linear blister strip 360 (i.e. having multiple pockets 362a, 362b in linear series) the registration with the perforations 312a, 312b in rotary series may not be exact at all points, but that for a rotary series of sufficient radial characteristic approximate registration is achievable for a certain number (e.g. three or five) of pockets (e.g. see description of Stage C of Figure 8). The solid sections 314a, 314b of the perforated plate 310 mask the surface surrounding the pockets 364. The radially mounted transfer pins 370a, 370b are inserted through the perforated plate 310 and the powder 330 is transferred to the blister pockets 362a, 362b. The filled blister strip 360 is then lowered and the pins 370a, 370b raised. The blanking plate 320 is relocated against the underside of the perforated plate 310, creating closed-off perforations 312a, 312b, which are filled with powder 330 in the next cycle.

It should be appreciated that the powder can also be transferred to other types of container, for example an injection moulded container, a capsule or other form of blind cavity.

The blister strip 360 of Figure 4 may be sealed by applying a lid sheet and providing sealing means so that the powder is contained in a medicament container defined by the pocket and elongate strip. Suitable methods of sealing the medicament carrier include the use of adhesives, staples or stamps and welding methods selected from hot metal welding, radio frequency welding and ultrasonic welding. Such sealing techniques may be used to form a suitable seal around the periphery of the medicament pocket which is capable of being peeled away by the patient or by a suitable trigger release mechanism in a controlled manner when in use.

Figure 4A shows a variation of the embodiment of Figure 4 in which the transfer pins 370a, 370b (only two labelled for clarity) have piston drive mechanisms, which enable the pins 370a, 370b to be sequentially lowered in a cascade pattern (e.g. sinusoidal pattern) as the perforations 312a, 312b are rotated past. Dotted line A-B shows a snapshot of the cascade pattern, wherein as in Figure 3A the pins move in cascade fashion in the direction A to B.

Figure 5a shows in top-view an apparatus suitable for use in the filling method herein. Figure 5b shows the apparatus of Figure 5a in a schematic, flattened out view (i.e. the view along the circumference of the apparatus, as if flattened out). The apparatus comprises a circular stainless steel plate 710 mounted for rotation about axis 711. The plate 710 is provided with three angularly spaced sets (only one labelled for clarity) of dual radial series 712a, 712b of sixty perforations arranged concentrically at a position spaced from the perimeter of the plate 710. A reservoir of powder 730 is provided to the plate 710 and guided by guide blades 732, 750 to adapt a particular configuration on the plate 710 dependent on the stage in the rotational cycle thereof.

The operation of the apparatus involves three distinct stages labelled A, B and C in both of Figures 5a and 5b and illustrated in more detail in the corresponding cutaway drawings of Figure 5a. It will be appreciated that the three stages are sequential (direction of rotation indicated on both Figures) and dependent on the experienced stage in the rotational cycle of the plate 710.

At Stage A, the filling stage, blanking pins 720a are brought upwards to close off the bottom of each perforation 712a of the plate (one closed-off perforation 712a shown in cutaway). Powder 730 is guided towards the closed off perforations 712a, 712b by the action of guide blade 732. Subsequent director blades 740, 742 then direct the powder firmly into the closed off perforations 712a, 712b. It may be seen on Figure 5b that the director blades 740, 742 each present a forward acute angle to the powder bed 730. Excess powder 730 is removed from the surface of the plate 710 adjacent to the filled closed off perforations 712a, 712b by the wiping action of wiping guide blade 750. It may be appreciated that Stage A of Figures 5a and 5b corresponds in essential function to the filling step of Figure 2 and that the filling step of Figures 1a, 1b and 1c may be used in alternative embodiments.

At Stage B, the compaction stage, the blanking pins 720a at the bottom of each perforation 712a of the plate (one closed-off perforation 712a shown in cutaway on Figure 5a) remain in place. Compaction pins 770a are now introduced into the top of

each closed-off perforation 712a to compact the powder therein. The degree (e.g. force) of compaction will depend on whether the ultimate product is intended to be a free-flowing powder, or alternatively a more dense powder. It may be appreciated that Stage B of Figures 5a and 5b is analogous to the compaction steps of Figures 3 and 3A, which detailed features may be used in alternative embodiments herein.

At Stage C, the transfer stage, the blanking pins 720a are first withdrawn to expose the bottom of each perforation 712a of the plate 710 (one perforation 712a shown in cutaway on Figure 5a). The dual series of sixty blisters 762a, 762b of blister strip 760 are then sequentially brought into registration with the exposed bottom of the corresponding series of filled perforations 712a, 712b. It will be appreciated that this is achieved by moving the blister strip 760 on a linear path as shown. The compacted powder in the closed off perforations 712a, 712b is then transferred into the blisters 762a, 762b of the blister strip 760 by the action of transfer pin 770a, which is inserted deep into the perforation 712a. It may be appreciated that Stage C of Figures 5a and 5b is analogous to the compaction steps of Figures 4 and 4A, which detailed features may be used in alternative embodiments herein.

It may also be appreciated that because the linear velocity of the two radial series of perforations 712a, 712b will differ slightly (although they share the same angular velocity) care is needed at Stage C in achieving a suitable registration with the corresponding series of blisters 762a, 762b, which of course, share the same linear velocity. Variations are envisaged in which the perforations 712a, 712b of the two radial series are slightly offset from each other to part compensate for this factor. Other variations are envisaged in which the relative size of the perforations 712a, 712b to the blisters 762a, 762b is selected in order to ensure an acceptable degree of registration (i.e. that which is sufficient to ensure effect transfer of compacted powder).

Post-filling, the blister strip 760 of Figures 5a and 5b is sealed by applying a lid sheet and providing sealing means so that the powder is contained within the strip 760. Suitable methods of sealing have been described hereinbefore.

The co-ordinated, cascade flowing movement of the blanking pins 720a and compaction pins 770a through the rotary cycle (i.e. through Stages A to C) may be appreciated by reference to Figure 5b.

The invention is suitable for filling blister packs, or other suitable containers, with powdered medicament, particularly for the treatment of respiratory disorders. Appropriate medicaments may thus be selected from, for example, analgesics, e.g., codeine, dihydromorphine, ergotamine, fentanyl or morphine; anginal preparations, e.g., diltiazem; antiallergics, e.g., cromoglycate (eg as the sodium salt), ketotifen or nedocromil (eg as the sodium salt); anti-infectives e.g., cephalosporins, penicillins, streptomycin, sulphonamides, tetracyclines and pentamidine; antihistamines, e.g., methapyrilene; anti-inflammatory, e.g., beclomethasone (eg as the dipropionate ester), fluticasone (eg as the propionate ester), flunisolide, budesonide, rofleponide, mometasone (eg as the furoate ester), ciclesonide, triamcinolone (eg as the acetonide), 6 α , 9 α -difluoro-11 β -hydroxy-16 α -methyl-3-oxo-17 α -propionyloxy-androsta-1,4-diene-17 β -carbothioic acid S-(2-oxo-tetrahydro-furan-3-yl) ester or 6 α , 9 α -Difluoro-17 α -[(2-furanylcarbonyl)oxy]-11 β -hydroxy-16 α -methyl-3-oxo-androsta-1,4-diene-17 β -carbothioic acid S-fluoromethyl ester; antitussives, e.g., noscapine; bronchodilators, e.g., albuterol (eg as free base or sulphate), salmeterol (eg as xinafoate), ephedrine, adrenaline, fenoterol (eg as hydrobromide), formoterol (eg as fumarate), isoprenaline, metaproterenol, phenylephrine, phenylpropanolamine, pirbuterol (eg as acetate), reproterol (eg as hydrochloride), rimiterol, terbutaline (eg as sulphate), isoetharine, tulobuterol or 4-hydroxy-7-[2-[[2-[[3-(2-phenylethoxy)propyl]sulfonyl]ethyl]amino]ethyl-2(3H)-benzothiazolone; PDE4 inhibitors eg cilomilast or roflumilast; leukotriene antagonists eg montelukast, pranlukast and zafirlukast; adenosine 2a agonists, e.g. 2R,3R,4S,5R)-2-[6-Amino-2-(1S-hydroxymethyl-2-phenyl-ethylamino)-purin-9-yl]-5-(2-ethyl-2H-tetrazol-5-yl)-tetrahydro-furan-3,4-diol (e.g. as maleate); α_4 integrin inhibitors e.g. (2S)-3-[4-({[4-(aminocarbonyl)-1-piperidiny]carbonyl}oxy)phenyl]-2-(((2S)-4-methyl-2-[[2-(2-methylphenoxy) acetyl]amino]pentanoyl)amino) propanoic acid (e.g. as free acid or potassium salt), diuretics, e.g., amiloride; anticholinergics, e.g., ipratropium (eg as bromide), tiotropium, atropine or oxitropium; hormones, e.g., cortisone, hydrocortisone or prednisolone; xanthines, e.g., aminophylline, choline

theophyllinate, lysine theophyllinate or theophylline; therapeutic proteins and peptides, e.g., insulin or glucagons. It will be clear to a person skilled in the art that, where appropriate, the medicaments may be used in the form of salts, (e.g., as alkali metal or amine salts or as acid addition salts) or as esters (e.g., lower alkyl esters) or as solvates (e.g., hydrates) to optimise the activity and/or stability of the medicament.

Preferred medicaments are selected from albuterol, salmeterol, fluticasone propionate and beclomethasone dipropionate and salts or solvates thereof, e.g., the sulphate of albuterol and the xinafoate of salmeterol.

Medicaments can also be delivered in combinations. Preferred formulations containing combinations of active ingredients contain salbutamol (e.g., as the free base or the sulphate salt) or salmeterol (e.g., as the xinafoate salt) or formoterol (eg as the fumarate salt) in combination with an antiinflammatory steroid such as a beclomethasone ester (e.g., the dipropionate) or a fluticasone ester (e.g., the propionate) or budesonide. A particularly preferred combination is a combination of fluticasone propionate and salmeterol, or a salt thereof (particularly the xinafoate salt). A further combination of particular interest is budesonide and formoterol (eg as the fumarate salt).

It may be appreciated that any of the parts of the filling apparatus which contact the powder may be coated with materials such as fluoropolymer materials which reduce the tendency of medicament to adhere thereto. Suitable fluoropolymers include polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) and fluoroethylene propylene (FEP). Any movable parts may also have coatings applied thereto which enhance their desired movement characteristics. Frictional coatings may therefore be applied to enhance frictional contact and lubricants used to reduce frictional contact as necessary.

It will be understood that the present disclosure is for the purpose of illustration only and the invention extends to modifications, variations and improvements thereto.

The application of which this description and claims form part may be used as a basis for priority in respect of any subsequent application. The claims of such subsequent application may be directed to any feature or combination of features described therein. They may take the form of product, method or use claims or may

include, by way of example and without limitation, one or more of the following claims:

wherein it is

made in a

CLAIMS

1. A method of loading a container with a defined quantity of product which comprises:
 - a) closing off a perforation in a perforated plate;
 - b) directing powder into said closed-off perforation by the sweeping action of a first director blade spaced from said perforated plate; and
 - c) transferring the contents of the perforation to said container,characterized by relative rotary motion of the perforated plate and said first director blade.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the first director blade is held static and the perforated plate moves in rotary fashion relative thereto.
3. A method according to claim 1, wherein the perforated plate is held static and the first director blade moves in rotary fashion relative thereto.
4. A method according to claim 1, wherein both of the first director blade and the perforated plate both move in rotary fashion.
5. A method according to any of claims 1 to 4, wherein the closing off is achievable by the use of a blanking plate.
6. A method according to any of claims 1 to 4, wherein the closing off is achievable by the use of a blanking pin inserted into the perforation.
7. A method according to claim 6, wherein the blanking pin is moveable within the perforation to adjust the volume of the closed-off perforation.
8. A method according to any of claims 1 to 4, wherein the closing off is achievable by placing a container in registration with the perforation.
9. A method according to any of claims 1 to 8, wherein the diameter of the closed-off perforation is between 1.5 and 15 mm.

10. A method according to any of claims 1 to 9, wherein the first director blade presents a forward acute angle to the path of relative motion.
11. A method according to claim 10, wherein said forward acute angle is between 1 and 60°.
12. A method according to claim 11, wherein the forward acute angle is between 5 and 25°.
13. A method according to any of claims 10 to 12, wherein the first director blade presents multiple forward acute angles to the path of relative motion.
14. A method according to claim 13, wherein the first director blade is curved in form.
15. A method according to claim 13, wherein the first director blade is articulated in form.
16. A method according to any of claims 10 to 15, wherein the first director blade has a flat tail section.
17. A method according to any of claims 1 to 16, wherein a thin layer of powder is left on the perforated plate after movement of the first director blade.
18. A method according to claim 17, wherein the depth of said thin layer of powder is from 3 to 20 mm.
19. A method according to claim 18, wherein the depth of said thin layer of powder is from 4 to 8 mm.
20. A method according to any of claims 1 to 19, wherein the powder is further directable by at least one subsequent director blade.

21. A method according to claim 20, wherein the at least one subsequent director blade moves along the perforated plate at a lower level than that of the first director blade.

22. A method according to claim 21, wherein the distance between the level of movement of the first director blade and the at least one subsequent director blade is 0 to 12 mm.

23. A method according to claim 22, wherein the distance between the level of movement of the first director blade and the at least one subsequent director blade is 1 to 3 mm.

24. A method according to either any of claims 1 to 23, additionally comprising removing excess powder from said perforated plate subsequent to directing powder into the perforation.

25. A method according to claim 24, comprising removing said excess powder by the action of a wiper.

26. A method according to any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the contents of the perforation are transferable by the action of a transfer pin.

27. A method according to any of claims 1 to 26, wherein directing powder into the closed-off perforation and transfer into the container is a continuous step.

28. A method according to any of claims 1 to 25, wherein transfer of the contents of the perforation to the container comprises:

- a) reopening the perforation;
- b) placing the container in registration with the perforation; and
- c) transferring the contents of the perforation into the container.

29. A method according to any of claims 1 to 25, wherein the contents of the perforation are transferable by the action of a vacuum system.

30. A method according to claim 29, wherein said vacuum system comprises a vacuum head and at least one vacuum cup.

31. A method according to any of claims 1 to 30, additionally comprising compacting the powder in the perforation.

32. A method according to claim 31, wherein the powder is compacted to a volume of between 50 and 100% of the original volume of powder in the closed-off perforation.

33. A method according to claim 32, wherein the powder is compacted to a volume of between 70 and 90% of the original volume of powder in the closed-off perforation.

34. A method according to any of claims 31 to 33, wherein the powder is compactable by the action of a compacting pin.

35. A method according to either of claims 26 or 34, wherein the transfer pin and the compacting pin are integral.

36. A method according to either of claims 26 or 34, wherein the transfer pin and the compacting pin are identical.

37. A method according to any of claims 1 to 36, wherein the container is a blind cavity.

38. A method according to claim 37, wherein the blind cavity is selected from the group consisting of a blister pocket, an injection moulded plastic pocket, a capsule and a bulk container.

39. A method according to any of claims 1 to 38, additionally comprising applying a lid to the container to protect the contents therein.

40. A method of loading each of plural blisters arranged in series on an elongate blister strip with a defined quantity of product which comprises:

- a) closing off plural perforations in a perforated plate, said plural perforations being arranged in series;
- b) directing powder into said plural closed-off perforations by the sweeping action of a first director blade spaced from said perforated plate; and
- c) transferring the contents of each of the perforations to a corresponding blister of said elongate blister strip,

characterized by relative rotary motion of the perforated plate and said first director blade.

41. A method according to claim 41, wherein in step c) each perforation of the perforated plate is serially brought into registration with the corresponding blister of the blister strip.

42. A method according to claim 41, wherein at registration the perforated plate is rotating and the blister strip is moving on a linear path.

43. A method according to any of claims 1 to 42, wherein the powder comprises a medicament.

44. A method according to claim 43, wherein the medicament is selected from the group consisting of albuterol, salmeterol, fluticasone propionate and beclomethasone dipropionate and salts or solvates thereof and any mixtures thereof.

45. An apparatus for loading a container with a defined quantity of product, which comprises:

- a) a perforated plate;
- b) a closure for reversibly closing off a perforation in the perforated plate;
- c) a director for directing powder into said closed-off perforation, said director comprising a first director blade spaced from the perforated plate; and
- d) a transferor for transferring the contents of the perforation to said container,

wherein the perforated plate and said first director blade are movable in a relative rotary fashion.

46. An apparatus according to claim 45, wherein the first director blade is held static and the perforated plate is movable in rotary fashion relative thereto.

47. An apparatus according to claim 45, wherein the perforated plate is held static and the first director blade is movable in rotary fashion relative thereto.

48. A method according to claim 45, wherein both of the first director blade and the perforated plate are movable in rotary fashion.

49. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 48, wherein the closure comprises a blanking plate.

50. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 48, wherein the closure comprises a blanking pin inserted into the perforation.

51. An apparatus according to claim 50, wherein the blanking pin is moveable within the perforation to adjust the volume of the perforation.

52. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 51, wherein the diameter of the closed-off perforation is between 1.5mm and 15mm.

53. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 48, wherein the closure comprises the container placed in registration with the perforation.

54. A method according to any of claims 45 to 53, wherein the first director blade presents a forward acute angle to the path of relative motion.

55. An apparatus according to claim 54, wherein the forward acute angle is between 1 and 60°.

56. An apparatus according to claim 55, wherein the forward acute angle is between 5 and 25°.

57. An apparatus according to any of claims 54 to 56, wherein the first director blade presents multiple forward acute angles to the path of relative motion.

58. An apparatus according to claim 57, wherein the first director blade is curved in form.

59. An apparatus according to claim 58, wherein the first director blade is articulated in form.

60. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 59, wherein the first director blade has a flat tail section.

61. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 60, wherein the first director blade is positioned to leave a gap of between 3 and 20mm between the first director blade and the perforated plate.

62. An apparatus according to claim 61, wherein the first director blade is positioned to leave a gap of between 4 and 8 mm between the first director blade and the perforated plate.

63. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 62, wherein the director further comprises at least one subsequent director blade.

64. An apparatus according to claim 63, wherein the at least one subsequent director blade is positioned closer to the perforated plate than the first director blade.

65. An apparatus according to claim 64, wherein the at least one subsequent director blade is positioned 0 to 12 mm closer to the perforated plate than the first director blade.

66. An apparatus according to claim 65, wherein the at least one subsequent director blade is positioned 1 to 3 mm closer to the perforated plate than the first director blade.

67. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 66, wherein the transferor comprises a transferor pin.

68. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 66, wherein the transferor comprises a vacuum system.

69. An apparatus according to claim 68, wherein the vacuum system comprises a vacuum head and at least one vacuum cup.

70. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 69, additionally comprising a compactor for compacting the powder in the perforation.

71. An apparatus according to claim 70, wherein the compactor comprises a compactor pin.

72. An apparatus according to either of claims 70 or 71, wherein the transferor and compactor are integral.

73. An apparatus according to either of claims 70 or 71, wherein the transferor and compactor are identical.

74. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 73, additionally comprising registration means for registering the container with the perforation.

75. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 74, additionally comprising a powder remover for removing excess powder from the perforated plate subsequent to action of the powder director.

76. An apparatus according to claim 75, wherein the powder remover comprises a wiper.

77. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 76, wherein the container is a blind cavity.

78. An apparatus according to claim 77, wherein the blind cavity is selected from the group consisting of a blister pocket, an injection moulded plastic pocket, a capsule and a bulk container.

79. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 78, additionally comprising a lid applier for applying a lid to the container to protect the contents thereof.

80. An apparatus for loading each of plural blisters arranged in series on an elongate blister strip with a defined quantity of product, which comprises:

- a) a perforated plate having plural perforations therein, said plural perforations being arranged in series;
- b) a closure for reversibly closing off each of said plural perforations in the perforated plate;
- c) a director for directing powder into each of said closed-off perforations, said director comprising a first director blade spaced from the perforated plate; and
- d) a transferor for transferring the contents of each of the perforations to a corresponding blister of said elongate blister strip,

wherein the perforated plate and said first director blade are movable in a relative rotary fashion.

81. An apparatus according to claim 80, additionally comprising registration means to serially bring each perforation of the perforated plate into registration with a corresponding blister of the blister strip.

82. An apparatus according to claim 81, additionally comprising rotational means to rotate the perforated plate and moving means to move the blister strip in linear fashion.

83. An apparatus according to any of claims 45 to 82, further comprising powder.

84. An apparatus according to claim 83, wherein the powder comprises a medicament.

85. An apparatus according to claim 84, wherein the medicament is selected from the group consisting of albuterol, salmeterol, fluticasone propionate and beclomethasone dipropionate and salts or solvates thereof and any mixtures thereof.

86. A container loaded with a powder product obtainable by the method according to any of claims 1 to 44.

Abstract

There is provided a method of loading a container with a defined quantity of product. The method comprises closing off a perforation in a perforated plate; directing powder into said closed-off perforation by the sweeping action of a first director blade spaced from said perforated plate; and transferring the contents of the perforation to said container. The method is characterized by relative rotary motion of the perforated plate and said first director blade. Suitable apparatus is also provided.

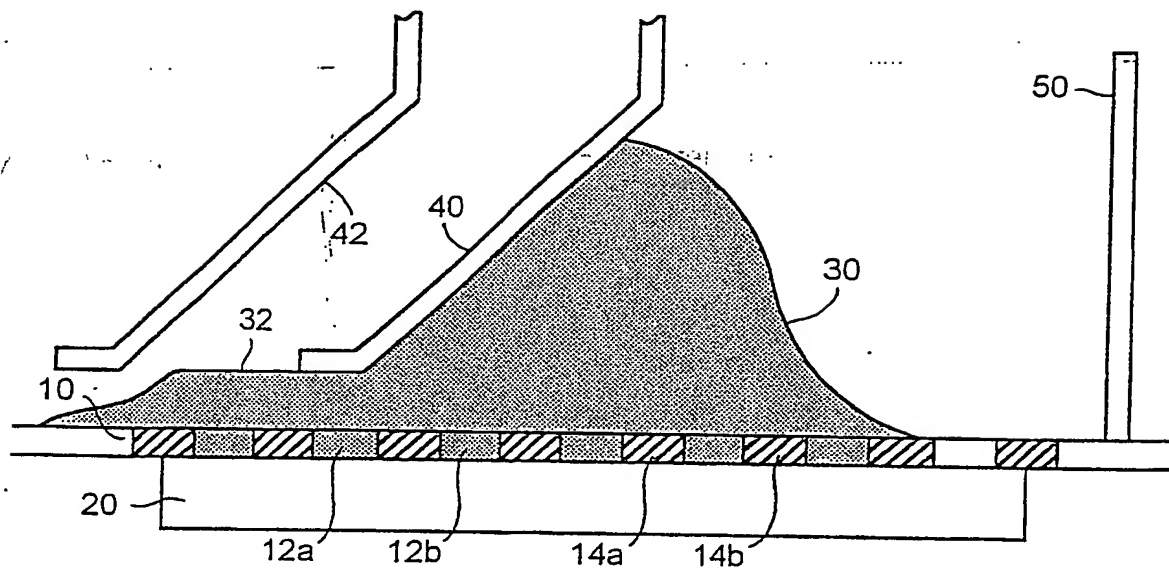


FIG. 1a

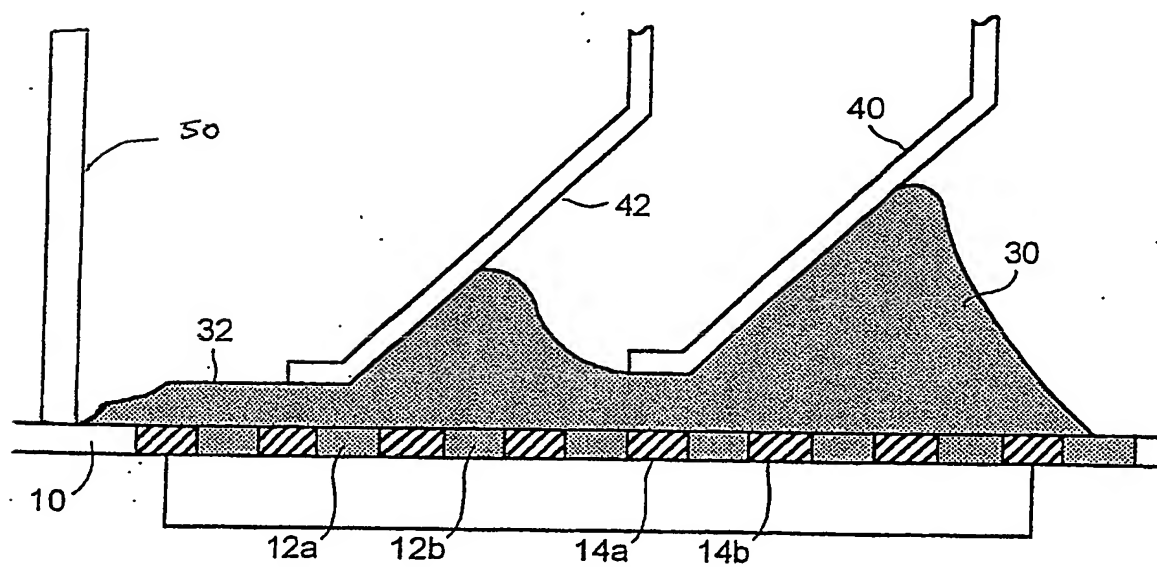
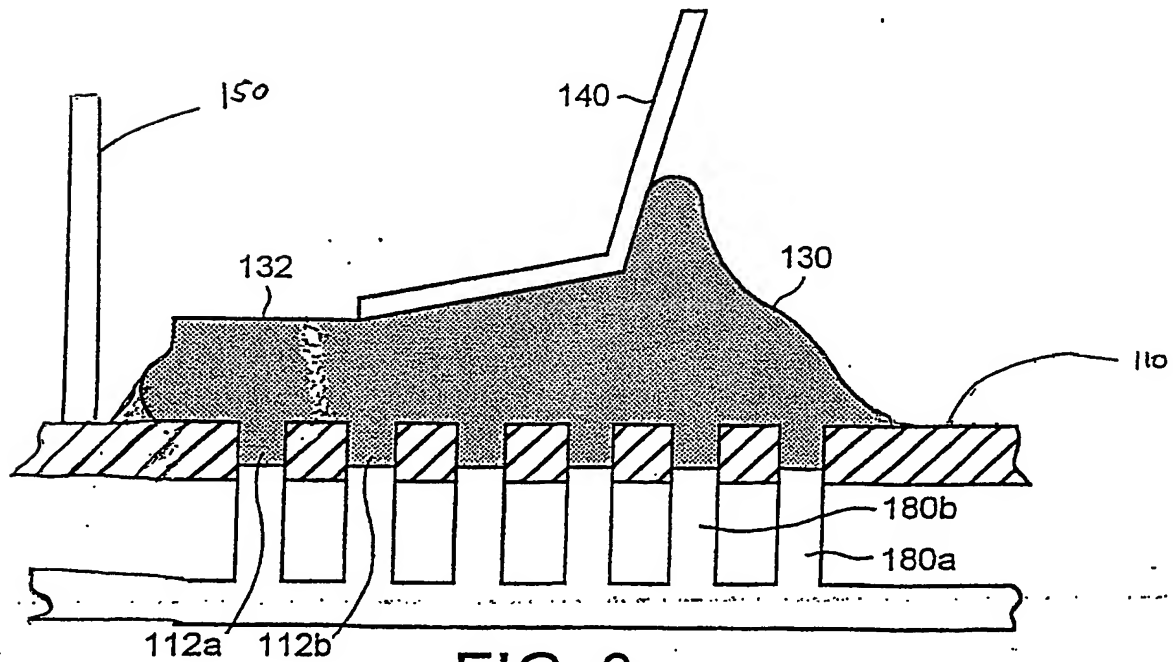
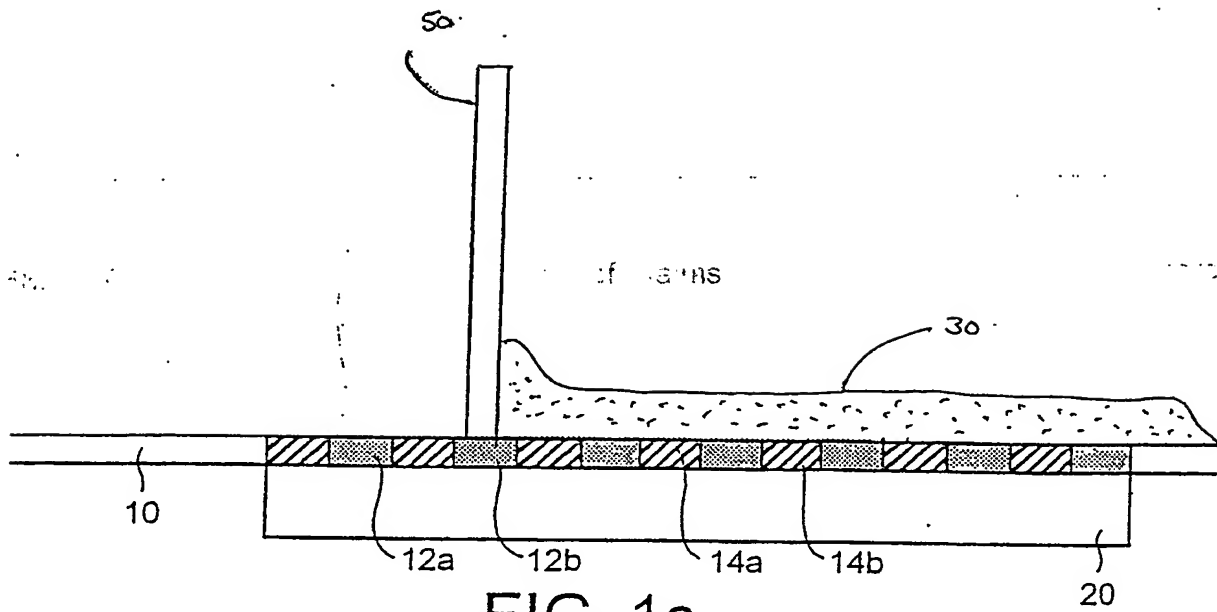


FIG. 1b



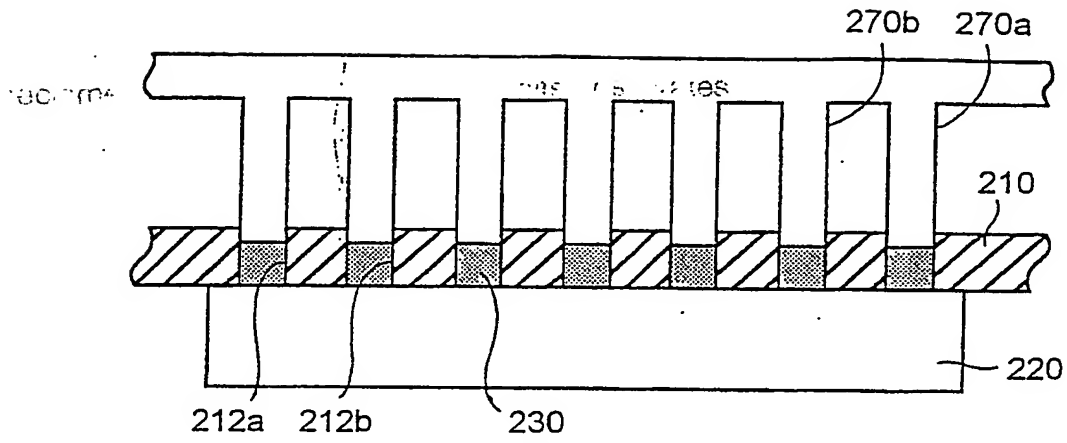


FIG. 3

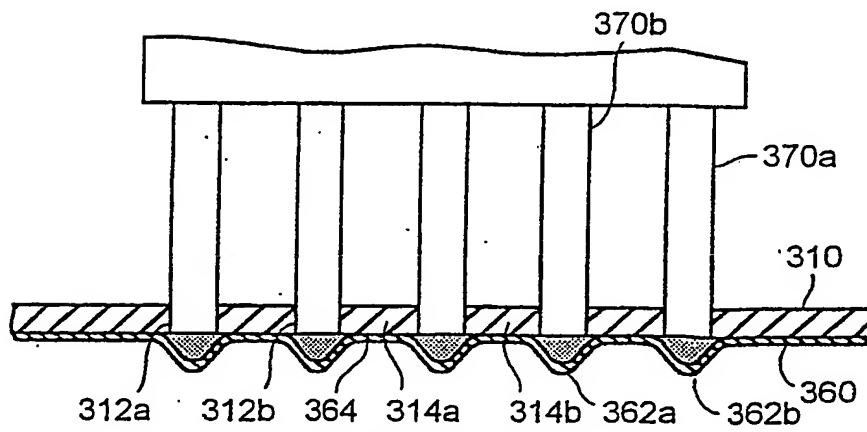


FIG. 4

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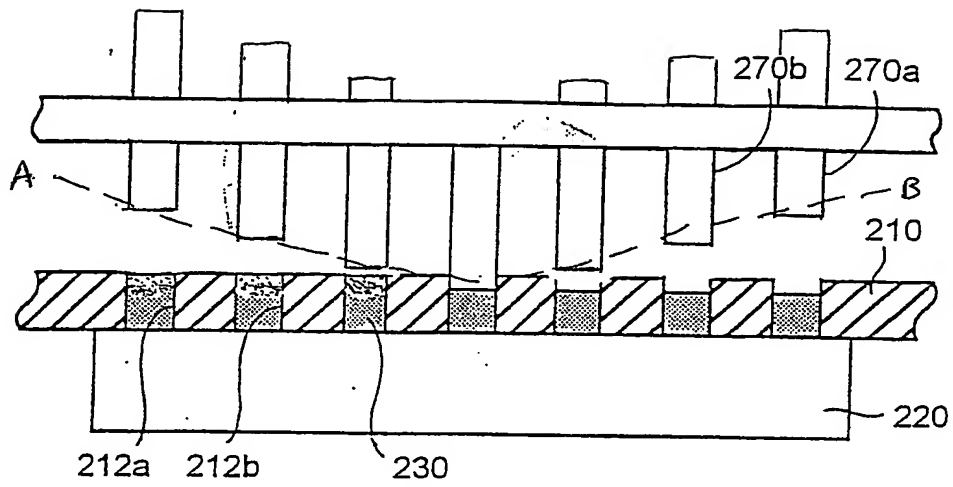


FIG. 3A

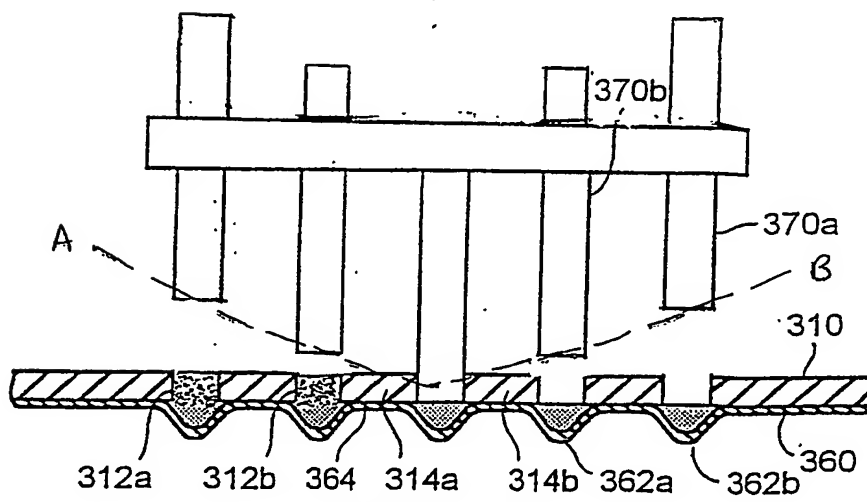


FIG. 4A

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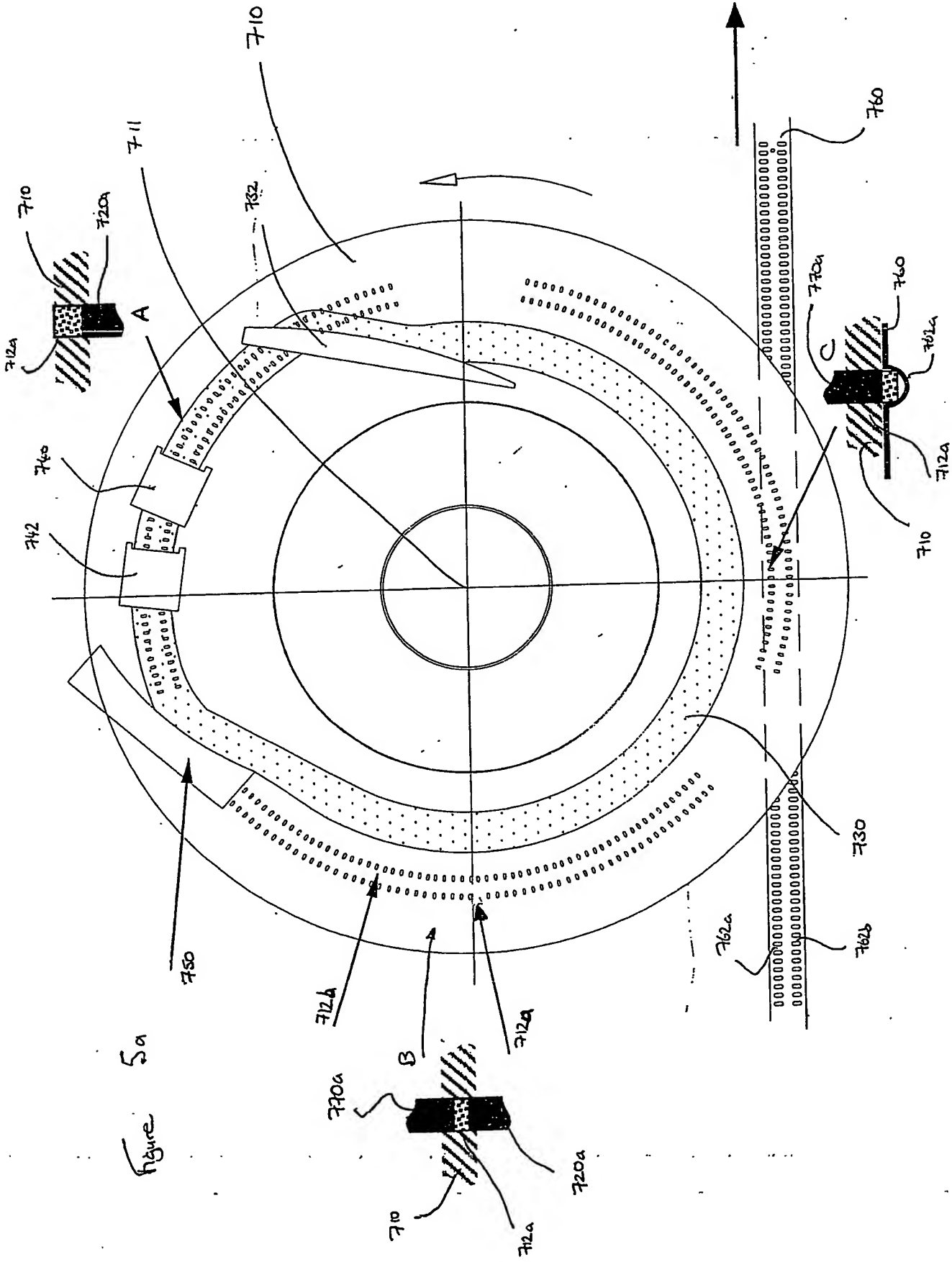
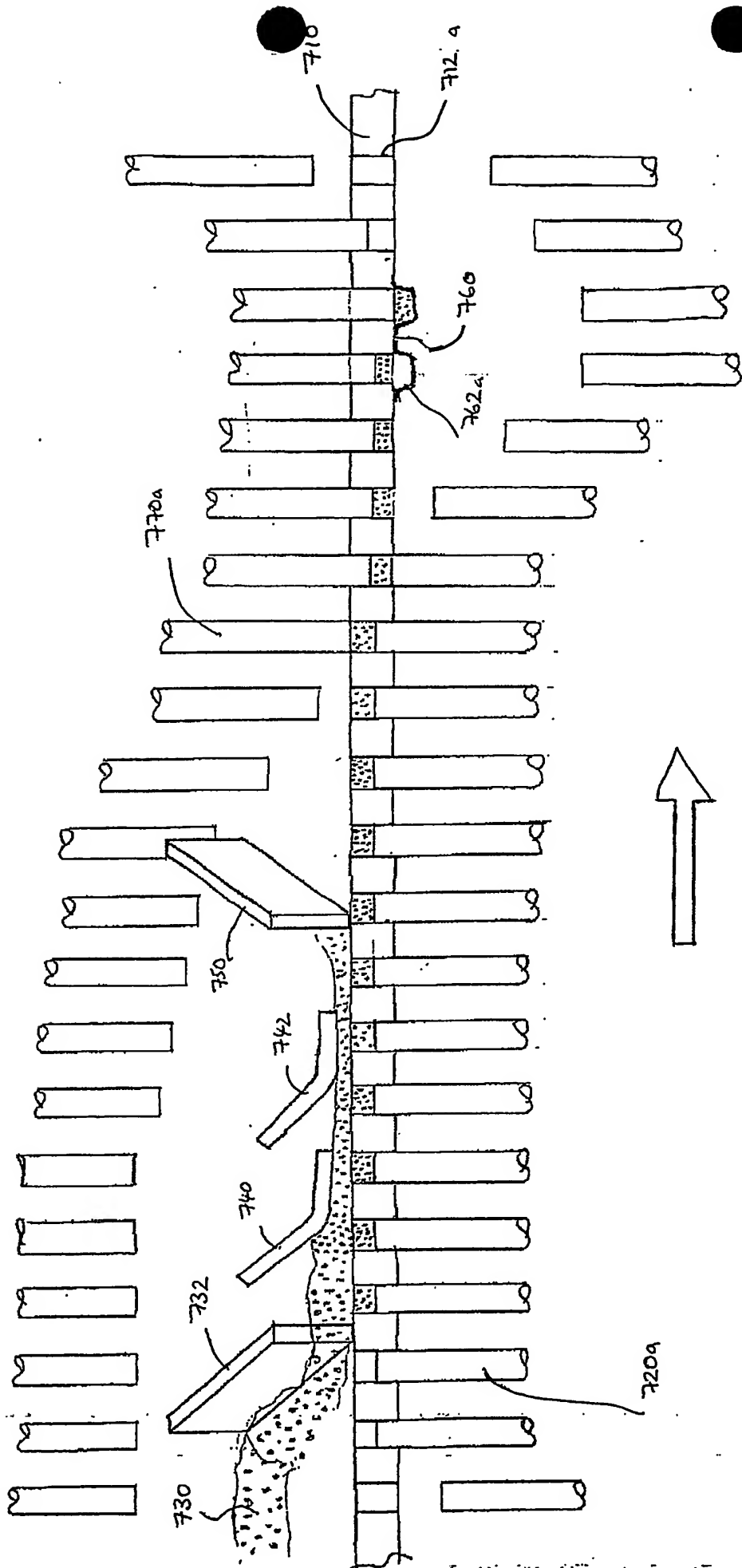


Figure 5a

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A

B

C

Figure 5b